

Vouchers—Where I Stand and Why  
Eleanor Holmes Norton  
August 28, 2003

It has been some time since we've seen honest to goodness citywide activism on a single issue, but we certainly are seeing it now. A new, very active Coalition for Accountable Public Schools of organizations, individuals, and ministers formed almost spontaneously after three D.C. officials abruptly endorsed private school vouchers paid for with federal money. Ministers, rabbis and imams are preparing to launch a Public Funds for Public Schools Lobby Day on Wednesday, September 3, during the midday lunch hour. Residents are dismayed that D.C. is in another vouchers fight in Congress. They remember that President Clinton responded to unanimous Council and School Board resolutions and kept the Congress from imposing vouchers on D.C. Now three D.C. officials are inviting Congress to do exactly that.

The majority of D.C. public officials have again gone on the record to oppose vouchers. However, Mayor Tony Williams, Council Member Kevin Chavous, and School Board President Peggy Cafritz are seeking funds for private school vouchers. Yet these are the officials with primary responsibility for public education in this city and the officials who are cutting D.C. Public Schools by \$40 million. Most residents don't yet know the worst of it. If the 2,000 children leave on private school vouchers the schools will lose an additional \$25 million in combined federal and local per pupil funding. Public officials have been entrusted with special responsibility to the children in our publicly accountable schools--- the D.C. public schools and our charter schools. Particularly given school budget cuts, our children in public schools could use the funds that may now go to far fewer in private schools.

The three claim concern for children over concern for their schools. When it comes to the majority of our children that is a distinction without a difference. It's a distinction that does not even hold up for the few children that would benefit from vouchers. A Government Accounting Office (GAO) study has found no significant improvement in the performance of children using vouchers.

When the anti-voucher Coalition formed here, the three pro-vouchers officials quickly regrouped and asked for money for both public schools *and* vouchers. However, when asked at a Government Reform Committee hearing if he had a choice, should the funds go to vouchers or public schools, Mayor Williams indicated he preferred the private school vouchers.

To make the vouchers acceptable however, Williams, Chavous and Cafritz have adopted the "three sector approach" that includes money for the D.C. public schools and for charter schools. The House bill, however, provides money only for vouchers. The Senate bill includes funds for public schools too, but with a big difference. For vouchers, \$13 million is authorized for five years. The comparable money for public and charter schools is for this year only, a sure indication that the public school money is there to help the more extensive vouchers funding get through Congress. (MORE)

If vouchers are imposed on D.C., we will be the only jurisdiction Congress has insisted accept vouchers. A solid bipartisan congressional majority, including many Republicans, has repeatedly voted down federal funds for vouchers for everyone else. The District should be the last jurisdiction to be targeted for vouchers. The city has moved far ahead of the rest of the country to make sure parents have alternatives to the traditional neighborhood schools. A child may go out of boundary to school. In addition, the most popular alternatives are the 42 charter schools, the largest number per capita in the country. Public officials should be seeking funds to ease crowding and reduce the wait lists of children eager to get into our charter schools.

Perhaps the most significant alternatives are the 15 transformation schools, low performing schools serving mostly low-income children and their parents. These schools have done what neither private nor public schools have done. All 15 schools scored improvements in Standard 9 achievement test scores. These improvements are the direct result of increased funding for extra services for students and parents alike. If pro-voucher officials are after federal money, these transformation schools are where to put it.

The majority of the City Council and of the elected members of the School Board have written Congress opposing the voucher rider now pending in the D.C. appropriation. From the Council they are Chairman Linda Cropp, Carol Schwartz, Jim Graham, Phil Mendelson, Sandra Allen, Vincent Orange and Adrian Fenty. From the School Board, they are Vice Chair Mirian Saez, Dwight Singleton, Tommy Wells and William Lockridge.

The Coalition has asked our office to reserve space in the Congress for Public Funds for Public Schools Lobby Day on September 3. They will be led by ministers 12-2PM from Room 2167 in the Rayburn Building. Residents can join them in speaking up for our children and for public education. Call the D.C. NAACP at 202-667-1700 for information.

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## **PUBLIC FUNDS FOR PUBLIC SCHOOLS FACT SHEET**

1. Congress has opposed vouchers for the country. Please oppose private school vouchers for the District of Columbia, too. We want equal treatment and equal respect for the majority position of D.C. residents and officials on vouchers.
2. If 2,000 children leave on vouchers, another \$25 million in federal and D.C. per pupil funding will be lost. Please do not hurt our children any more than the millions in cuts D.C. public school children are already getting right now because of the economic turn-down.
3. The majority of D.C. elected officials and residents, like the majority in [our state] [our country], oppose vouchers. The majority of D.C. officials have written Congress opposing private school vouchers. Council President Linda Cropp also submitted a unanimous Council resolution opposing vouchers and referring to a D.C. law making charter schools D.C.'s alternative for parents desiring options to D.C. public schools. Many charter schools are housed in inadequate facilities but are so popular that there are long waiting lists. Some of our churches have made space for charter schools and know first hand the need for federal money for additional facilities.
4. We are particularly interested in the most needy children. They are the children least likely to have parents who would use vouchers. We are very encouraged that the 15 transformation schools many of these children attend have done what no private or public schools have ever done—significantly raised the test scores of the children who

perform most poorly in our schools. This breakthrough was the result of extra funds for parents and children alike. Because transformation schools have been proven to work for the children who perform least well, we particularly urge federal funds for them.

5. Opening the door for vouchers in one jurisdiction, D.C., will clear the way for private schools [in our state and] throughout the country to demand the same.
6. Especially today when local schools have had their budgets deeply cut, D.C. vouchers will set off a competition between public and private schools demanding funding from scarce federal education funds.
7. We oppose the three-sector approach in the Senate bill and ask that vouchers be eliminated and that funds go to the two publicly accountable schools—charter schools and D.C. public schools. Scarce federal funds should be strictly reserved for schools accountable to Congress and school districts. Public schools were added to the Senate bill as a cover to get the vouchers through. One indication of this is that there is a five-year authorization for vouchers but only a one-time appropriation for public schools.
8. Direct any new federal funds to public and charter schools. Our local district(s) are required to meet the mandates of the No Child Left Behind statute without the promised federal funds and need more federal funds.
9. A congressional (GAO) study of all the voucher jurisdictions found no difference in student performance between students in public schools and students using private school vouchers.

July 24, 2003

TO: The Honorable Rodney Frelinghuysen  
Chairman  
Appropriations Subcommittee on the District of Columbia  
2442 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Chaka Fattah  
Ranking Member  
Appropriations Subcommittee on the District of Columbia  
2301 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

FROM: Councilmember Carol Schwartz  
Councilmember Jim Graham  
Councilmember Phil Mendelson  
Councilmember Sandra Allen  
Councilmember Vincent Orange  
Councilmember Adrian Fenty  
Board of Education, Vice Chair, Mirian Saez  
Board of Education, Member, Dwight Singleton  
Board of Education, Member, Tommy Wells  
Board of Education, Member, William Lockridge

We very much appreciate Senate efforts to get additional funds for the District of Columbia public schools. However, we are concerned about the effect of a pending vouchers amendment to the D.C. appropriation. We support recent efforts in the Senate to remove vouchers from the pending Senate appropriation rather than linking funds for our public schools to vouchers. It is important to recognize that the District of Columbia has established two sets of publicly accountable alternatives: transformation schools and charter schools.

First, three years ago, Superintendent Paul Vance established 15 transformation schools, among our lowest performing schools, attended by many of our lowest income children. These children have scored the first significant improvements in Stanford 9 achievement scores. Extra services provided to parents and children alike, as well as new faculty, are largely responsible for these gains. We hope you agree that these children in our successful alternative public schools deserve first priority for federal funding, especially now when the school system is making \$40 million in cuts because of budget pressures. These cuts will likely affect the continued progress of children in the transformation schools. We believe that the provision in the Senate appropriations bill for the D.C. public schools would help shore up the loss of funds to transformation and other D.C. public schools.

Second, the District of Columbia has established the largest number of charter schools per capita in the country. However, these charter schools are so popular that the city cannot keep up with the demand, particularly for adequate facilities. Funds are urgently needed to provide these facilities so that we can move children from warehouses and churches to appropriate buildings, as the Senate bill would allow.

We do not believe that it is fair to place the District of Columbia at the center of a debate on vouchers. We ask that you remove us from this controversial debate by eliminating the voucher provision. This action would go a long way toward freeing the D.C. appropriation while preserving funds for the deserving students in our public and charter schools.

Thank you for your help in this important matter.

July 24, 2003

## Listen to D.C. Parents! Vote No on Vouchers

Dear Colleague:

The attached letter to the D.C. appropriators is from the two organizations that represent the majority of parents in the District of Columbia. Many of you will recognize Parents United as the major parents organization driving school reform on the District, including its work in compelling the correction of violations and the rehabilitation of school buildings. Our D.C. Parent Teachers Association operates like your own PTAs.

You listen to your own parents before you vote. Please listen to mine. D.C. parents want a no vote on vouchers!

Sincerely,

Eleanor Holmes Norton



## Parents United for the D.C. Public Schools

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11 Dupont Circle NW, Rm.433 Washington, D.C. 20036 Phone (202) 518-3667 Fax (202) 319-1010

July 24, 2003

The Honorable Rodney Frelinghuysen  
Chairman  
Appropriations Subcommittee on the District of Columbia  
2442 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Chaka Fattah  
Ranking Member  
Appropriations Subcommittee on the District of Columbia  
2301 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Parents United for the D.C. Public Schools and the District of Columbia Parent Teachers Association (DCPTA) oppose any action by the Congress of the United States that would use federal funds to support a voucher program in the District of Columbia. Together, we represent the parents of the District of Columbia. Members of Congress may remember Parents United for the lawsuit that compelled the city to correct safety violations and which led to the development of a master facilities plan for the D.C. public Schools (DCPS).

The majority of our membership has overwhelmingly voiced strong opposition to funding vouchers in the District of Columbia. As the public schools continue to work hard to meet the needs of all students and are held to higher standards, federal dollars should not fund private schools that will choose their students and are held to no standards.

As parents who are engaged and involved with our local schools as well as at the citywide level, we also want to bring to your attention a particularly urgent concern. Since our schools are formula funded, 2000 fewer students leaving DCPS at once mean a loss of \$25 million. Recently, the Board of Education took a vote to rescind negotiated pay raises for all staff, part of a \$40 million cut in DCPS. More losses would cripple school funding.

On behalf of thousands of D.C. Public School parents, we ask that you cast a no vote for this and any other voucher bill.

Sincerely,

Iris J. Toyer, Co-Chair  
Parents United for the D.C. Public Schools

Darlene T. Allen, President  
District of Columbia Parent Teachers Association





For Immediate Release  
July 24, 2003

Contact: Stacey Farnen  
202-225-3130

## **HOYER PAY PARITY AMENDMENT PASSES FULL HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE**

*Blue-Collar Workers Included for First Time in Pay Parity*

**WASHINGTON – House Democratic Whip Steny Hoyer (MD) released the following statement today after the Full House Appropriations Committee adopted the Hoyer-Wolf-Moran amendment to the Fiscal Year 2004 Transportation Treasury Appropriations Bill to provide a 4.1% pay adjustment for federal civilian employees, including blue collar employees, providing them with pay parity with military employees:**

“I am very pleased that the Committee supported my amendment to provide a 4.1% pay adjustment for federal civilian employees, including blue collar employees, providing them with pay parity with the military.

“I am especially pleased that we were able to include blue collar employees in our pay parity efforts for the first time. These workers include Munitions Operators who load, modify and maintain 280MM artillery, mortars, bombs, and grenades, and Instrument Mechanics who troubleshoot complex integrated hydraulic, pneumatic, and mechanical controls/systems. Our nation depends on these workers to maintain our planes, ships, tanks and weapons systems at constant states of readiness. And these skilled craft and trade federal employees certainly deserve pay parity as much as their white-collar counterparts.

“Federal civilian employees work everyday to make this country a better and safer place for all Americans. Whether it is protecting our borders, fighting deadly diseases, researching how to improve our children’s education or working side-by-side with our military, federal employees’ work often goes unnoticed despite the fact that it touches every American life. I thank the Members of the Committee for recognizing their service.”

*For a copy of Mr. Hoyer’s amendment please call the Office of the Democratic Whip at 202-225-3130.*

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## MEDIA RELEASE

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For Immediate Release  
August 28, 2003

Contact: Stacey Farnen  
202-225-3130

# HOYER VOWS VICTORY IN FIGHT FOR FAIR FEDERAL EMPLOYEE PAY

*President Pushes for Lower Pay Adjustment Days before Labor Day*

**WASHINGTON – House Democratic Whip Steny Hoyer (MD) released the following statement today in response to a letter from President Bush to Speaker Dennis Hastert announcing his decision to invoke a national emergency to avoid implementing the federal employee pay adjustment provided for in the Federal Employee Pay Comparability Act.** The President continued to advocate a 2 percent pay raise and a \$500 million Human Capital Performance Fund as he proposed in his 2004 budget earlier this year.

**In July, the full House Appropriations Committee adopted the Hoyer-Wolf-Moran amendment to the Fiscal Year 2004 Transportation Treasury Appropriations Bill to provide a 4.1% pay adjustment for federal civilian employees, including blue collar employees, providing them with pay parity with military employees.**

“President Bush continued to demonstrate a lack of appreciation for federal employees in his letter released yesterday, just days before Labor Day, the day that honors all American workers. His decision to invoke a national emergency to provide an inadequate pay raise for the very men and women who are confronting that emergency on a daily basis smacks of indifference, or at least a failure to understand the role federal employees play in keeping America safe.

“The President’s action is made worse by his willingness at the same time to provide political appointees with bonuses and his relentless pursuit of trillions of dollars of tax breaks that mainly benefit the wealthiest Americans, not the middle-class. If the Administration is unable to fairly compensate career federal employees who work just as hard, it should not award bonuses to its political appointees. And, the Administration should not ask federal employees to give up \$1.6 billion in pay to help pay for the war while providing \$85 billion in tax cuts in 2003 alone for those making over \$200,000.

“It is important to keep this issue in perspective. The 4.1 percent pay adjustment that I have been advocating for federal employees with many of my colleagues in Congress would cost an additional \$1.6 billion over the president’s proposal. In comparison, the federal government spends \$1.6 billion *in just twelve days in Iraq*.

“The Administration appears to believe federal employees are an easy target. But I urge the President to remember that the workers he is shortchanging are the scientists at the CDC who are working to protect Americans against a biological terrorist attack, the men and women of the CIA who are risking their lives

around the world in the fight against terrorism, and the Customs officers who guard our borders. These are not faceless clerks pushing paper in the bowels of government bureaucracy.

“I will continue my fight on Capitol Hill to provide a fair pay adjustment for federal employees when Congress returns next week.”

*The Federal Employee Pay Comparability Act (FEPCA) of 1991 provides for annual pay adjustments for federal employees of base annual pay and locality pay. Under FEPCA, the base annual pay adjustment is based on Employment Cost Index (ECI), which measures change in private sector wages and salaries. The ECI showed that the annual across-the-board increase would be 2.7% in January 2004 and would cost approximately \$2.7 billion.*

*Under FEPCA, the locality payment adjustment is calculated by the Bureau of Labor Statistics through a National Compensation Survey that reviews 32 regions nationwide. The NCS showed that the locality adjustment, overall, should be 15.1% starting in January 2004 and would cost approximately \$12.5 billion.*

*Under FEPCA, the president is required to present an alternative pay plan before September 1 if he disagrees with the FEPCA base pay formulation. President Bush did this on August 28 when he announced the base annual pay adjustment would be only 1.5%, not the ECI recommended 2.7% -- a 1.2% reduction. Further, the president proposed a 0.5% locality pay adjustment, which will cost \$500 million. Finally, he proposed yet again the controversial \$500 million “Human Capital Performance Fund”, which was granted only \$2.5 million in the House 2004 Transportation Treasury Appropriations Bill passed by the full Appropriations Committee in July.*

*The decision President Bush announced yesterday, while not without precedent, is highly unusual. Since FEPCA became law, the ECI recommended adjustment has been rejected only in August 1993, August 1995, August 1997, and August 2003.*

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**CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20515**

June 25, 2003

The Honorable C.W. Bill Young  
Chairman  
House Committee on Appropriations  
Room H-218

The Honorable David R. Obey  
Ranking Member  
House Committee on Appropriations  
Room H-218

The Honorable Ernest J. Istook, Jr.  
Chairman  
House Subcommittee on Transportation,  
Treasury and Independent Agencies  
Room 2358 Rayburn HOB

The Honorable John W. Olver  
Ranking Member  
House Subcommittee on Transportation,  
Treasury and Independent Agencies  
Room 1016 Longworth HOB

Dear Chairmen and Ranking Members:

As you work toward the funding needs for the nation's transportation systems, we respectfully request that you fund Amtrak at \$1.812 billion -- the level requested by its President and CEO, David Gunn.

Fully funding Amtrak's grant request will allow Mr. Gunn to bring stability to Amtrak's operations. Policymakers will then be able to debate the railroad's future in something other than a crisis environment. In the year that he has been at the helm of Amtrak, David Gunn has completely reorganized the railroad, created efficiencies by streamlining the workforce, and worked closely with the states to increase their share to 100 percent of the operating loss for services Amtrak operates at the states' request. He has also begun the tasks of repairing wrecked and damaged cars, improving on-time performance, and upgrading the quality of service to Amtrak's customers. At the same time, he has taken steps to eliminate unprofitable lines of business and to refocus the company on its core mission -- moving passengers.

The DOT Inspector General and others have made it clear that Amtrak requires a substantial Federal investment to rehabilitate its infrastructure. In attempting to meet the self-sufficiency mandate that Congress enacted in the Amtrak Reform and Accountability Act of 1997, Amtrak had no choice but to postpone critical infrastructure replacement and maintenance activities. The result is a railroad in poor financial and physical shape. The problem can be fixed -- and must be fixed -- but it will take time and money. We believe that David Gunn has demonstrated to this Congress that he has the knowledge, discipline, and integrity to make the reforms required to right the previous wrongs at Amtrak. His track record speaks for itself.

Mr. Gunn has opened Amtrak's books and they are available to anyone who wishes to see them. The numbers make it clear that Amtrak is teetering on the brink of the precipice and needs to be stabilized. The \$1.812 billion that Amtrak has requested for FY 2004 is critical to bringing about that stability. As you work to reach agreement on the appropriate funding for the respective modes, we urge you to approve \$1.812 billion for Amtrak.

Sincerely,

Jack Quinn

Corine Brown

Robert M. Reed

Earl Blumenauer

Robert J. Matsui

Richard E. Neal

John M. McHugh

Charles W. Stenholm

Jim Oberstar

Mike Costle

Jim Langer

Tina Turner

Neil Abernethy

Raul M. Grijalva

John P. Turner

Bob D. Latta

## ***Vote for the Petri/Olver Amendment***

Dear Colleague:

We write to urge you to support our amendment to save the transportation enhancements program. Our amendment would strike language in HR 2989, the FY 2004 Transportation, Treasury, and Independent Agencies Appropriations bill, that eliminates funding specifically dedicated for transportation enhancements.

This well-established program was first created in the 1991 ISTEA and continued in TEA 21. In fact, the President has extended the program in his TEA 21 reauthorization proposal, known as SAFETEA. Although small in size – constituting only about two percent of the overall funding of the Federal-aid highway program -- enhancements pack a big punch in terms of impact on our local communities.

The transportation enhancement program improves the economic and environmental health of our communities. It has funded more than 15,000 projects nationwide, helping communities create bicycle and pedestrian paths, develop walkable downtowns, and protect scenic vistas and historical sites. To date, bicycle and pedestrian facilities, combined with rail-to-trails, comprise over one-half of all enhancements obligations. Some of you may not even realize the projects in your area that have been funded with enhancements dollars --- there is a Web site, [www.enhancements.org](http://www.enhancements.org) where you can identify all of the projects in your Congressional district funded by the enhancements program.

The enhancements program has been part of a successful and balanced national transportation plan for the last 12 years. We urge you to support our amendment to save this important transportation program.

# **Enhancements Talking Points In Response to H.R. 2989 Transportation and Treasury Appropriations Bill for FY2004**

## **Background**

On July 24, the House Appropriations Committee voted to eliminate the guaranteed funding for the popular Transportation Enhancement (TE) program. The Appropriations Bill (H.R. 2989) approved by the committee will be voted on by the full House of the Representatives in early September. An amendment to H.R. 2989 will be offered to reverse the committee action and restore the funding set-aside for TE.

## **The Ask**

Vote to strike Section 114 from H.R. 2989 and oppose any other amendments that might be offered that reduce, flex or undercut the Transportation Enhancements program.

## **Talking Points**

1. H.R. 2989 eliminates the guaranteed funding for the popular Transportation Enhancement program. Proponents of the funding cut say revenues are falling and the economy is tight and therefore cuts must be made – but H.R. 2989 actually increases the transportation budget by \$4.5 billion over the Administration's funding request. The Appropriations Committee proposes to take an additional \$600 million from TE and divert it to highway projects.
2. Congress established the TE program in 1991 as a guarantee to their constituents that a small percentage of their gas tax dollars would be targeted to small-scale, community-initiated, locally selected transportation projects. H.R. 2989 breaks that promise, and contradicts the intent of ISTEA and TEA-21 to provide balanced, intermodal transportation networks.
3. Congress created the program because state departments of transportation were simply not investing in projects supporting bicycling, walking, trails, scenic or historic preservation, and other enhancements to the transportation system. There is little evidence to suggest that state DOTs will be any more willing to do so now than they were 12 years ago.
4. The TE program has supported more than 16,000 local transportation projects in almost every county and Congressional District in the country. These projects have made American communities better places to live by:
  - a. Inspiring community revitalization,
  - b. Creating safe places to walk and bicycle,
  - c. Restoring historic transportation infrastructure, and
  - d. Sparking hometown pride